<i>WORD</i>

Generative Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style

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Concept of Literary Style

A style is a way of writing—that is what the word means. And that is almost as much as one can say with assurance on the subject, which has been remarkably unencumbered by theoretical insights. Yet we know a good deal more than that, in a way: the same way, roughly in which a native speaker "knows" the grammar of English, although no existing grammatical analysis gives a full and adequate account of his linguistic intuition. Readers familiar with literature have what might sensibly be called a *stylistic* intuition, a rather loosely structured, but often reliable, feeling for the quiddity of a writer's linguistic method, a sense of differences between stretches of literary discourse which are not differences in content. In fact many readers can tell, by skimming a batch of unfamiliar passages, not only that the differences are there, but who the authors are. Read the first few paragraphs of a *New Yorker* story and you can often (without a surreptitious glance at the end) identify it as a Cheever, an O'Hara, an Updike, or a Salinger, even if the subject matter is uncharacteristic. Further evidence, if any is needed, of the reliability of stylistic intuitions is the ability of some to write convincing parodies, and of others to recognize them as such. Thus the theorist of style is confronted by a kind of task that is commonplace enough in most fields: the task of explicating and toughening up for rigorous use a notion already familiar to the layman.

But in stylistics the scholar has always had to make do with a theoretical apparatus not far removed from that of the layman. And although many practitioners have plied their craft with great subtlety, a survey of their work leaves one far from certain what that craft *is*. For the attempt to isolate the cues one attends to in identifying styles and in writing stylistic parody has sprawled out into an almost embarrassing profusion of critical methods. And most of these methods, I believe, are interesting in inverse proportion to their emphasis on what we sense as style. The following list will suggest, but not exhaust, the multiplicity of approaches:

(1) What might be called "diachronic stylistics," the study of changes in national literary style from one period to the next. Clearly this approach presupposes a mastery of what might be called

(2) "Synchronic stylistics," or the study of this or that period style. Since

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the style of a period can only be the sum of linguistic habits shared by most writers of that period, synchronic stylistics presupposes in turn the ability to describe the style of a single writer. But there is little agreement upon how such description is to be managed; many methods compete for critical attention.

(3) Impressionism: the application of metaphorical labels to styles ("masculine," "limber," "staccato," "flowing," "involuted," etc.), and the attempt to evaluate (Swift's style is the best, or the most natural to English). This sort of criticism makes agreeable parlor conversation, records something of the critic's emotional response, and gives intuition its due, but little else can be said in its favor.

(4) The study of sound, especially of rhythm. This approach is capable of some rigor, but the more rigor (that is, the more strictly the critic attends to physical or to phonemic features), the less relevance to what we sense as style. For—let me state this dogmatically—in prose, at least, rhythm as perceived is largely dependent upon syntax, and even upon content, not upon stress, intonation, and juncture alone.

(5) The study of tropes. Attention to metaphor, antithesis, synecdoche, zeugma, and the other figures of classical rhetoric often proceeds from a desire to see the writer's style in terms of what he thought he was doing, and to this extent points away from a descriptive analysis of style, and toward the history or philosophy of rhetorical theory. Even when the studies of figurative language maintain a descriptive focus, they embrace only a small, though important, part of style, and liberally mixed with content, at that.

(6) The study of imagery. The fact that a writer favors images of disease, money, battle, or the like, is frequently of great interest, but imagery divorced from its syntactic embodiment is surely more a matter of content than of style.

(7) The study of what is variously called "tone," "stance," "role," and so on: roughly, the writer's attitude toward what he is saying, toward his reader, and toward himself, as suggested by his language. The critic in this vein infers, from the locutions on the printed page, a hypothetical live situation in which such language would be appropriate, and discusses the social and emotional features of that situation. This approach has unquestionably been fruitful. Its success depends on a highly developed sense of connotative meaning, both of words and of constructions, and this sense is something that many critics possess in abundance. Tone, however, like figurative language, is only a part of style, and the question remains in what measure tone itself is a product of formal linguistic features.

(8) The study of literary structure, which, like the study of tropes and tone, has flourished among the new critics. And to be sure, patterns of organization in a literary work are *related* to style (the way a novel is put together may have an analogue in the way a sentence is put to- gether), but to consider structure a *component* of style, except perhaps in a short poem, stretches the meaning of the term "style" to its limits.

(9) The analysis of particular and local effects—a change of verb tense, or the placement of an interrogative, for instance, in a certain passage. Clearly, individual strategies of this sort fit more comfortably under the heading of *technique* than of style, for style has to do primarily with the habitual, the recurrent.

(10) The study of special idiosyncrasies, such as the omission of causal connectives from contexts where they usually appear. Such quirks are doubtless stylistic elements, and they can richly reward analysis, as a number of studies by Leo Spitzer have shown. But a few idiosyncrasies do not add up to a style, by any method of calculation.

(11) The study of a writer's lexicon, as pursued, for example, by Josephine Miles. Lexical preferences, unless seen in the context of a ramified system of word classes, are like imagery patterns, in that they reveal more about content than about style.

(12) The statistical study of grammatical features—abstract nouns, ad- jectives, subordinate clauses, questions, and the like. This method is without doubt pertinent, but significant results have been highly elusive. One reason is the crudeness of the categories which traditional grammar has made available to critics, whose knowledge of linguistics generally seems to lag by a few decades. (Linguists, by and large, have not busied themselves with stylistics.) Another reason, equally im- portant, is the overwhelming inefficiency of the procedure, given the very large number of grammatical categories, and the lack of any grammatical system that relates them in meaningful, formally moti- vated ways. Without such a theory, a collection of counts is simply a collection of counts.

And indeed, the inability of these and other methods, in spite of many partial successes, to yield a full and convincing explication of the notion of style seems in general to follow from the absence of an appropriate under- lying linguistic and semantic theory. A style is a characteristic use of language, and it is difficult to see how the *uses* of a system can be under- stood unless the system itself has been mapped out. It is no surprise, in other words, to find stylistics in a state of disorganization when syntax and semantics, upon which stylistics clearly depends, have themselves been hampered by the lack of a theory that is inclusive, unified, and plausible.

The situation in stylistics is understandably analogous to that in the philosophy of language,[1] though more muddled still. Just as philosophers have tended to concentrate on this or that discrete feature of language—words, or groups of words, or grammatical predication, or the relation of reference, or logical structure—in isolation from the rest, so analysts of style have talked about sound, tropes, images, diction, devices of conjunction, parallel structure, and so on, without any apparent sense of priority or centrality among these concerns. Thus, in a time when linguistic theory and practice have passed through at least one renaissance, the most service-able studies of style[2] continue to proceed from the critic's naked intuition, fortified against the winds of ignorance only by literary sophistication and the tattered garments of traditional grammar. Especially damaging is the critic's inability, for lack of a theory, to take into account the deeper structural features of language, precisely those which should enter most re-vealingly into a stylistic description.

It is my contention that recent developments in generative grammar, particularly on the transformational model, promise, first, to clear away a good deal of the mist from stylistic theory, and, second, to make possible a corresponding refinement in the practice of stylistic analysis. In the re-mainder of this paper I hope to state a case for the first of these claims, and to make a very modest initial thrust toward documenting the second.

That Chomsky's formulation of grammatical theory is potentially useful should become apparent from an examination of the common sense notion of style. In general that notion applies to human action that is partly in-variant and partly variable. A style is a *way* of doing *it*. Now this picture leads to few complications if the action is playing the piano or playing tennis. The pianist performing a Mozart concerto must strike certain notes in a certain order, under certain restrictions of tempo, in a certain relation to the orchestra, and so on. These limitations define the part of his be-havior that is fixed. Likewise, the tennis player must hit the ball over the net with the racket in a way partly determined by the rules of the game (errors and cheating are not style). But each has a significant amount of freedom, beyond these established regularities: the tennis player, for in-stance, chooses from a repertory of strokes, shots, and possible placements (analogous, perhaps, to the linguistic resources of the writer or speaker), and he also has freedom of intensity, smoothness, flamboyance, etc. (as the

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[1] See Jerrold Katz and Jerry Fodor, "What's Wrong with the Philosophy of Language?," *Inquiry* V (1962), pp. 197–237.

[2] William K. Wimsatt, *The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, 1941), and Jonas Barish, *Ben Johnson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), to name just two of the best.

writer or speaker has freedom in the use of paralinguistic resources like loudness and emphatic punctuation). The tennis player's use of these options, in so far as it is habitual or recurrent, constitutes his style. But the relevant division between fixed and variable components in literature is by no means so obvious. What *is* content, and what is form, or style? The attack on a dichotomy of form and content has been persistent in modern criticism; to change so much as a word, the argument runs, is to change the meaning as well. This austere doctrine has a certain theoretical appeal, given the supposed impossibility of finding exact synonyms, and the onto-logical queerness of disembodied content—propositions, for instance—divorced from any verbal expression. Yet at the same time this doctrine leads to the altogether counterintuitive conclusion that there can be no such thing as style, or that style is simply a part of content.[3]

To put the problem more concretely, the idea of style implies that words on a page might have been different, or differently arranged, without a corresponding difference in substance. Another writer would have said *it* another *way*. For the idea of style to apply, in short, writing must involve choices of verbal formulation. Yet suppose we try to list the alternatives to a given segment of prose: "After dinner, the senator made a speech." A dozen close approximations may suggest themselves ("When dinner was over, the senator made a speech," "The senator made a speech after dinner," "A speech was made by the senator after dinner," etc.), as well as a very large number of more distant renderings ("The senator made a post-prandial oration," "The termination of dinner brought a speech from the senator," etc.). Which ones represent stylistic variations on the original, and which ones say different things? We may have intuitions, but to support them is no trivial undertaking. Clearly it would help to have a gram-mar that provided certain relationships, formally statable, of alternative-ness among constructions. One such relationship, for example, might be that which holds between two different constructions that are derived from the same starting point. And, of course, a generative grammar allows the formulation of precisely this sort of relationship.

In the phrase structure component, to begin with, there are alternate ways of proceeding from identically labeled nodes, alternate ways of expanding (or rewriting) a symbol. A verb phrase may be expanded[4] into

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[3] For an earlier attempt by the present author to deal with this problem, see "Prole-gomena to the Analysis of Prose Style," in *Style in Prose Fiction; English Institute Essays*, 1958, ed. Harold C. Martin (New York, 1959), pp. 1–24.

[4] I do not mean to suggest that a speaker or writer actually performs these operations. But the different possibilities of expansion in the grammar do offer an analogue to the choices open to the writer.

a transitive verb plus a noun phrase, a copula plus an adjective, a copula plus a noun phrase, or any one of several other combinations.[5] The various possibilities for rewriting at this stage of the grammar account for some of the major sentence types in English, and since the structural meaning of, say, $V_t + NP$ differs considerably from that of $Be + Adj$, a writer's preference for one or another of these forms may be a stylistic choice of some interest.

But notice that the possibility of alternative routings in the phrase structure component does not really solve the problem of style in a satisfactory way. I have been looking for linguistically constant features that may be expressed in different ways. The difficulty with taking a unit like the verb phrase for such a constant is its abstractness, its lack of structure. The symbol VP merely stands for a *position* in a string at one level of description. Two different expansions of VP will both occupy the same position, but will not necessarily retain any structural feature in common. Nor will the sentences that ultimately result from the two derivations necessarily share any morphemes or even morphemes from the same classes. Thus, the rewriting of VP as $V_t + NP$ is part of a derivation that leads eventually to the sentence "Columbus discovered America," among others. But there is no kernel sentence corresponding (semantically) to this one which results from a derivation in which NP is rewritten $Be + Adj$. Sentences like "Columbus was brave," or possibly "Columbus was nautical" are about as close as one can come. And certainly they are not stylistically different expressions of the same thing, in the sense required for stylistics—not in the way that "America was discovered by Columbus" is. The phrase structure part of the grammar does not account for intuitively felt relationships of sameness and difference between sentences, for the possibility of saying one "thing" in two different ways. Perhaps this is one reason why almost no important work in stylistic criticism has evolved from the grammatical analyses of American linguists.

To be of genuine interest for stylistics, a grammar must do more than simply provide for alternate derivations from the same point of origin. There are at least three important characteristics of transformational rules which make them more promising as a source of insight into style than phrase structure rules. In the first place, a large number of transformations are optional, and in quite a different sense from the sense in which it is optional how VP is expanded. VP must *be* expanded by one of the various

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[5] Possibly some other order of expansion is preferable, such as the one Lees uses: VP → (Prev) Aux + MV. See Robert B. Lees, *The Grammar of English Nominalizations*, Part II, *International Journal of American Linguistics* XXVI 3 (1960), 5. If the grammar takes this form, then the choice I am speaking of enters only with the expansion of the main verb. Such questions are immaterial, however, to my point.

rules, or of course no sentence will result from the derivation. But an optional transformation need not be applied at all. Given a string or pair of strings so structured that a certain optional transformation can apply, failure to apply it will not keep the derivation from terminating in a sentence.[6] Thus "Dickens wrote *Bleak House*" is a sentence, as well as "*Bleak House* was written by Dickens," which has undergone the passive transformation. Likewise, "Dickens was the writer of *Bleak House*" is a sentence, one that comes from the same kernel string as the other two, via a different optional transformation: agentive nominalization.[7] Technically, transformations apply to underlying strings with certain structures, but for the purposes of this paper they may be thought of as manipulations—re-ordering, combination, addition, deletion—performed on fully formed sentences, rather than as ways of *getting* to parts of fully formed sentences from incomplete, abstract symbols such as NP. Each application of a different optional transformation to a sentence results in a new sentence, similar in some ways to the original one. Thus a grammar with transformational rules will generate many pairs and limited sets of sentences, like the set of three sentences about Dickens, which belong together in an intimate structural way—not simply by virtue of being sentences. Many such sets of sentences will strike a speaker as saying "the same thing"—as being alternatives, that is, in precisely the sense required for stylistics.

A second and related reason why transformational happenings are relevant to style is the very fact that a transformation applies to one or more *strings*, or elements with structure, not to single symbols like VP, and that it applies to those strings by virtue of their structure. A transformation works changes on structure, but normally leaves *part* of the structure unchanged. And in any case, the new structure bears a precisely specifiable relationship to the old one, a relationship, incidentally, that speakers of the language will intuitively feel. Moreover, the transform retains at least some morphemes from the original string; that is, transformations are specified in such a way that "Columbus discovered America" cannot become, under the passive transformation, "*Bleak House* was written by Dickens," although this sentence has the same structure as the proper transform "America was discovered by Columbus." This property of transformations —their preserving some features from the original string—accounts for the fact that sets of sentences which are transformational alternatives seem to be different renderings of the same proposition.[8] Again, this is the sort of

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[6] This is simply to rephrase the definition of an optional transformation; see Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* ('s-Gravenhage, 1957), p. 45.

[7] Lees, *op. cit.*, p. 70 (transformation T47).

[8] Notice that many such sets, including the three sentences about Dickens, will share

relationship which seems intuitively to underlie the notion of style, and for which only a transformational grammar offers a formal analogue.

The third value of a transformational grammar to the analyst of style is its power to explain how complex sentences are generated, and how they are related to simple sentences. Writers differ noticeably in the amounts and kinds of syntactic complexity they habitually allow themselves, but these matters have been hard to approach through conventional methods of analysis. Since the complexity of a sentence is the product of the generalized transformations it has gone through, a breakdown of the sentence into its component simple sentences and the generalized transformations applied (in the order of application) will be an account of its complexity.[9] And since the same set of simple sentences may usually be combined in different ways, a set of complex sentences may be generated from them, each of which differs from the others only in transformational history, while embodying the same simple "propositions." Such differences should be interestingly approachable through transformational analysis. So should major variations in type of compounding: self-embedding as against left- and right-branching, for example, or the formation of endocentric as against the formation of exocentric constructions. These deep grammatical possibilities in a language may well be exploited differently from writer to writer, and if so, the differences will certainly be of stylistic interest.

Let me summarize. A generative grammar with a transformational component provides apparatus for breaking down a sentence in a stretch of discourse into underlying kernel sentences (or strings, strictly speaking) and for specifying the grammatical operations that have been performed upon them. It also permits the analyst to construct, from the same set of kernel sentences, other non-kernel sentences. These may reasonably be thought of as *alternatives* to the original sentence, in that they are simply different constructs out of the identical elementary grammatical units.[10]

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the same *truth conditions*, to use the philosopher's term. This fact gives further encouragement to anyone who would treat transformational alternatives as different expressions of the same proposition.

[9] Since deletions and additions will probably have taken place in the course of the derivation, the complex sentence will naturally not contain all and only all of the linguistic elements contained in the component sentences. These must be reconstructed and supplied with appropriate hypothetical elements, but there is generally a strong formal motivation for reconstructing the component sentences in one way rather than another.

[10] Of course the alternative forms need not be complete sentences, or single sentences. That is, the alternatives to sentence A may include (1) sentence B, (2) part of sentence C, and (3) the group of sentences, D, E, and F. The most interesting alternatives to a given sentence often arrange the kernel material in units of different lengths.

Thus the idea of alternative phrasings, which is crucial to the notion of style, has a clear analogue within the framework of a transformational grammar.

But is it the *right* analogue? What I have called "transformational alternatives" are different derivatives from the same kernel sentences. The notion of style calls for different ways of expressing the same content. Kernel sentences are not "content," to be sure. Yet they *have* content, and much of that content is preserved through transformational operations. "Dickens was the writer of *Bleak House* and America was discovered by Columbus" says much the same thing, if not exactly the same thing, as "Dickens wrote *Bleak House*; Columbus discovered America." Of course some transformations import new content, others eliminate features of content, and no transformation leaves content absolutely unaltered. The analogue is not perfect. But it is worth remembering that other kinds of tampering with sentences (e.g., substitution of synonyms) also change content. And, to look at it another way, the most useful sense of "content" —*cognitive* content—may be such that transformations do generally leave it unaltered (and such that synonyms do exist).[11] In any case, transformational alternatives come as close to "different expressions of the same content" as other sorts of alternatives; moreover, they have the practical advantage of being accessible to formal, rather than to impressionistic, analysis. There is at least some reason, then, to hold that a style is in part a characteristic way of deploying the transformational apparatus of a language, and to expect that transformational analysis will be a valuable aid to the description of actual styles.

So much for theory and prophecy. The final proof must come, if it comes at all, from a fairly extensive attempt to study literary styles in the way I am suggesting. For a transformational analysis, however appealing theoretically, will not be worth much unless it can implement better stylistic descriptions than have been achieved by other methods—"better" in that they isolate more fully, economically, and demonstrably the linguistic features to which a perceptive reader responds in sensing one style to be different from another. The space available here will not suffice for a full scale demonstration, nor do I now have at my disposal nearly enough stylistic description to prove my case. Besides, the necessary grammatical machinery is by no means available yet (in fact, it is too early to say with certainty that Chomsky's plan for grammars is the right one—there are many dissenters). I shall use the rest of this paper merely to outline, by

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[11] I owe this point and several others to correspondence and conversation with Noam Chomsky.

example, a simple analytic procedure that draws on the concept of grammatical transformations, and to suggest some virtues of this procedure.

My first specimen passage comes from Faulkner's story, "The Bear." It is part of a sentence nearly two pages long, and its style is complex, highly individual, and difficult—if it is read aloud, most hearers will not grasp it on first hearing. It is also, I believe, quite typically Faulknerian:

> the desk and the shelf above it on which rested the letters in which McCaslin recorded the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on), and the older ledgers clumsy and archaic in size and shape, on the yellowed pages of which were recorded in the faded hand of his father Theophilus and his uncle Amodeus during the two decades before the Civil War, the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves: . . .[12]

I propose to reduce the complexity of the passage by reversing the effects of three generalized transformations, plus a few related singulary transformations:

(1) The relative clause transformation (GT 19 in Lees' *The Grammar of English Nominalizations*, p. 89), along with the WH-transformations (Lees, T 5 and T 6, p. 39), the transformation which later deletes "which" and "be" to leave post-nominal modifiers (Lees, T 58, p. 94), and the transformation which shifts these modifiers to prenominal position (Lees, T 64, p. 98).[13]

(2) The conjunction transformation (Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, p. 36).

(3) The comparative transformation, which, along with several reduction transformations and one order change,[14] is responsible for sentences like "George is as tall as John."[15]

Without this grammatical apparatus, the passage reads as follows:

> the desk. The shelf was above it. The ledgers₁ rested on the shelf. The ledgers₁ were old. McCaslin recorded the trickle of food in the ledgers₁. McCaslin recorded the trickle of supplies in the ledgers₁. McCaslin recorded the trickle of equipment in the ledgers₁. The trickle was slow. The trickle was outward. The trickle returned each fall as cotton.

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[12] William Faulkner, "The Bear," in *Go Down Moses* (New York: Modern Library, 1942), pp. 255–256.

[13] For another version of these transformations, see Carlota S. Smith, "A Class of Complex Modifiers in English," *Language* XXXVII (1961), pp. 347–348, 361–362.

[14] Strong as cables → cable-strong.

[15] Lees, "Grammatical Analysis of the English Comparative Construction," *Word* XVII (1961), pp. 182–183. Carlota S. Smith, in "A Class of Complex Modifiers in English," offers a fuller treatment of such constructions, but Lees' simpler analysis is adequate for my present purposes.

The cotton was made. The cotton was ginned. The cotton was sold. The trickle was a thread. The cotton was a thread. The threads were frail. Truth is frail. The threads were impalpable. Equators are impalpable. The threads were strong to bind them for life to the land. They made the cotton. Their sweat fell on the land. Cables are strong. The ledgers$_2$ were old. The ledgers$_2$ rested on the shelf. The ledgers$_2$ were clumsy in size. The ledgers$_2$ were clumsy in shape. The ledgers$_2$ were archaic in size. The ledgers$_2$ were archaic in shape. On the pages of the ledgers$_2$ were recorded in the hand of his father during the two decades the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves. On the pages of the ledgers$_2$ were recorded in the hand of his uncle during the two decades the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves. The pages were yellowed. The hand was faded. The decades were before the Civil War. His father was Theophilus. His uncle was Amodeus.[16]

There is some artificiality in this process, of course. The order of the reduced sentences is in part arbitrary. More important, the transformations I have reversed are not the last ones applied in the generation of the original construction; hence precisely the set of sentences (strings) above would not have occurred at any point in the derivation. Nonetheless, this drastic reduction of the original passage reveals several important things:

(1) The content of the passage remains roughly the same: aside from the loss of distinctions between "and" and "yet," "as ———— as" and "more ———— than," relative clauses and conjoined sentences, and the like, changes in content are minor. But the style, obviously, has undergone a revolution. In the reduced form of the passage there are virtually no traces of what we recognize as Faulkner's style.

(2) This denaturing has been accomplished by reversing the effects of only three generalized transformations, as well as a few related singular transformations. The total number of optional transformations involved is negligible as against the total number that apparently exist in the grammar as a whole. In other words, the style of the original passage leans heavily upon a very small amount of grammatical apparatus.

(3) Most of the sentences in the reduced version of the passage are kernel sentences. Most of the rest are only one transformation away from kernel sentences. Further reduction, by undoing any number of other transformations, would not change the passage or its style nearly so much as has already been done.[17]

(4) The three major transformations I have deleted have an important feature in common. Each of them combines two sentences that share at least one morpheme,[18] and in such a way that the transform may con-

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[16] Subscripts mark differences in referent.

[17] Passives and pronouns are also fairly prominent here, but not enough to make them striking as stylistic features.

[18] Except that conjunction may also operate on two sentences with no common morphemes.

tain only one occurrence of that morpheme (or those morphemes), while preserving the unshared parts of the original sentences. That is to say, these transformations are all what might be called "additive." To put the matter semantically, they offer methods of adding information about a single "thing" with a minimum of repetition. Thus the two sentences "The threads were impalpable" and "The threads were frail" might be combined through any one of the three generalized transformations at issue here: "The threads which were impalpable were frail" (relative); "The threads were frail and impalpable" (conjunction); and "The threads were more frail than impalpable" (comparison). The three transforms are somewhat similar, both formally and semantically; and it seems reasonable to suppose that a writer whose style is so largely based on just these three semantically related transformations de- monstrates in that style a certain conceptual orientation, a preferred way of organizing experience.[19] If that orientation could be specified, it would almost certainly provide insight into other, non-stylistic features of Faulkner's thought and artistry. The possibility of such insight is one of the main justifications for studying style.

The move from formal description of styles to critical and semantic interpretation should be the ultimate goal of stylistics, but in this article I am concerned only with the first step: description. My first example shows that the style of at least one short passage can be rather efficiently and in- formatively described in terms of a few grammatical operations. It might be objected, however, that the transformations I have concentrated on in destroying the style of the Faulkner passage are of such prominence in the grammar, and in the use of English, that *any* writer must depend heavily upon them. To show that this is not universally the case, it is sufficient to perform the same reductions on a characteristic passage from the work of another writer with a quite different style. Consider, therefore, the con- clusion of Hemingway's story, "Soldier's Home":

> So his mother prayed for him and then they stood up and Krebs kissed his mother and went out of the house. He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had touched him. He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie. He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it. There would be one more scene maybe before he got away. He would not go down to his father's office. He would miss that one. He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way. Well, that was all over now, anyway. He would go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball.[20]

[19] It is apparently common for stylistic features to cluster like this in the work of an author. See my study, Shaw; The Style and the Man (Middletown, Conn., 1962), for numerous examples, and for an attempt to link style with cognitive orientation.
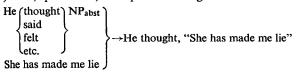
[20] The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York, 1953), pp. 152–153.

Reversing the effects of the relative and comparative transformations barely alters the passage: only the prenominal modifier "indoor" is affected. Removing the conjunctions does result in some changes:

> So his mother prayed for him. Then they stood up. Krebs kissed his mother. Krebs went out of the house. He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had touched him. He had felt sorry for his mother. She had made him lie. He would go to Kansas City. He would get a job. She would feel all right about it. There would be one more scene maybe before he got away. He would not go down to his father's office. He would miss that one. He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way. Well, that was all over now, anyway. He would go over to the schoolyard. He would watch Helen play indoor baseball.

Notice that the reduced passage still sounds very much like Hemingway. Nothing has been changed that seems crucial to his style. Note too that although the revised passage is quite simple, none of the sentences is from the kernel. Hemingway is not innocent of transformations: he is relying on pronominalization, on a group of nominalizations, and, most notably, on a sequence of transformations responsible for what critics call the *"style indirect libre."* These transformations work this way:

(1) GT; quotation, or reported thought:

$$\text{He} \left\{ \begin{matrix} \text{thought} \\ \text{said} \\ \text{felt} \\ \text{etc.} \end{matrix} \right\} \left. \begin{matrix} NP_{abst} \\ \\ \\ \\ \text{She has made me lie} \end{matrix} \right\} \rightarrow \text{He thought, "She has made me lie"}$$

(2) Indirect discourse (change of pronouns and of verb tense):

> He thought, "She has made me lie" → He thought that she had made him lie

(3) Deletion:

> He thought that she had made him lie → She had made him lie[21]

The original passage, stripped of the effects of these transformations, reads as follows:

> So his mother prayed for him and they stood up and Krebs kissed his mother and went out of the house. He thought this: I have tried so to keep my life from being complicated. Still, none of it has touched me. I have felt sorry for my mother and she has made me lie. I will go to Kansas City and get a job and she will feel all right about it. There will be one more scene maybe before I get away. I will not go down to my father's office. I will miss that one. I want my life to go smoothly. It has just gotten going that way. Well, that is all over now, anyway. I will go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball.

[21] Morris Halle (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) explained these transformations to me. He is treating them in a forthcoming article on Virginia Woolf's style, and I make no attempt here to put the rules in proper and complete form. It should be noted though, that there is at present no justification for the grammar to contain rule number three as a transformation, since the transform is already generated by other rules.

The peculiar double vision of the style, the sense of the narrator peering into the character's mind and scrupulously reporting its contents, the possibility of distance and gentle irony—all these are gone with the transformational wind.

To be sure, these transformations do not in themselves distinguish Hemingway's style from the styles of many other writers (Virginia Woolf, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, etc.). But it is interesting, and promising, that a stylistic difference so huge as that between the Faulkner and Hemingway passages can be largely explained on the basis of so little grammatical apparatus.

Up to this point, I have been exploring some effects on style of particular transformations and groups of transformations, and arguing that this method of description has, potentially, considerable value for literary critics. But there are at least two other ways in which transformational machinery will aid the analyst of style.

First, it has often been pointed out that constructions may be left-branching ("Once George had left, the host and hostess gossiped briskly"), right-branching ("The host and hostess gossiped briskly, once George had left"), or self-embedding ("The host and hostess, once George had left, gossiped briskly"). Neither left- nor right-branching constructions tax the hearer's understanding, even when compounded at some length ("a very few not at all well liked union officials"; "the dog that worried the cat that chased the rat that ate the cheese that lay in the house that Jack built"). But layers of self-embedding quickly put too great a strain on the unaided memory ("the house in which the cheese that the rat that the cat that the dog worried chased ate lay was built by Jack"). Even a relatively small amount of self-embedding in a written passage can slow a reader down considerably.

With these preliminaries, consider the following sentence, which begins a short story:

> She had practically, he believed, conveyed the intimation, the horrid, brutal, vulgar menace, in the course of their last dreadful conversation, when, for whatever was left him of pluck or confidence—confidence in what he would fain have called a little more aggressively the strength of his position—he had judged best not to take it up.[22]

The style is idiosyncratic in the highest degree, and the writer is, of course, Henry James. His special brand of complexity is impossible to unravel through the method I pursued with Faulkner. A number of *different* transformations are involved. But notice that most of this complexity results from self-embedding. With the embedded elements removed the sentence is still far from simple, but the Jamesian intricacy is gone:

[22] "The Bench of Desolation," *Ten Short Stories of Henry James*, ed. Michael Swan (London, 1948), p. 284.

> She had practically conveyed the intimation in the course of their last dreadful conversation, when he had judged best not to take it up.

The following are the deleted sentences, with their full structure restored:

> He believed [it].
> [The intimation was a] horrid, brutal, vulgar menace.
> [Something] was left him of pluck or confidence.
> [It was] confidence in the strength of his position.
> He would fain hove called [it that], a little more aggressively.

The embedded elements, in short, significantly outweigh the main sentences itself, and needless to say, the strain on attention and memory required to follow the progress of the main sentence over and around so many obstacles is considerable. The difficulty, as well as the Jamesian flavor, is considerably lessened merely by substituting left- and right-branching constructions for self-embedding, even though all the kernel sentences are retained:

> He believed that in the course of their last dreadful conversation she had practically conveyed the intimation, a horrid, brutal, vulgar menace, which he had then judged best not to take up, for whatever was left him of pluck or confidence—confidence in the strength of his position, as he would fain have called it, a little more aggressively.

It seems likely that much of James's later style can be laid to this syntactic device—a matter of *positioning* various constructions, rather than of favoring a few particular constructions. The relevance of positioning to style is, to be sure, no news. But again, transformational analysis should clarify the subject, both by providing descriptive rigor and by making available a set of alternatives to each complex sentence.

Finally, styles may also contrast in the kinds of transformational operations on which they are built. There are four possibilities: addition, deletion, reordering, and combination. Of these, my final sample depends heavily on deletion. The passage is from D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, a book with an especially brusque, emphatic style, which results partly from Lawrence's affection for kernel sentences. But his main idiosyncrasy is the use of truncated sentences, which have gone through a variety of deletion transformations. Here is the excerpt:

> The renegade hates life itself. He wants the death of life. So these many "reformers" and "idealists" who glorify the savages in America. They are death-birds, life-haters. Renegades.
>
> We can't go back. And Melville couldn't. Much as he hated the civilized humanity he knew. He couldn't go back to the savages. He wanted to. He tried to. And he couldn't.
>
> Because in the first place, it made him sick.[23]

[23] D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1955), p. 149.

With the deleted segments replaced, the passage reads, somewhat absurdly,
like this:

> The renegade hates life itself. He wants the death of life. So these many "reformers"
> and "idealists" who glorify the savages in America [want the death of life]. They are
> death-birds. [They are] life-haters. [They are] renegades.
>
>   We can't go back. And Melville couldn't [go back]. [Melville couldn't go back, as]
> much as he hated the civilized humanity he knew. He couldn't go back to the savages.
> He wanted to [go back to the savages]. He tried to [go back to the savages]. And he
> couldn't [go back to the savages].
>
>   [He couldn't go back to the savages] because, in the first place, it made him sick
> [to go back to the savages].

One does not need grammatical theory to see that Lawrence is deleting.
But the restoration of the full form which is allowed by the grammar does
reveal two interesting things. First, there is a large amount of repetition in
the original passage, much more than actually shows. Perhaps this fact
accounts for the driving insistence one feels in reading it. Second, Lawren-
tian deletion is a stylistic alternative to *conjunction*, which can also take
place whenever there are two sentences partly alike in their constituents.
The reasons for Lawrence's preferring deletion to conjunction might well be
worth some study.

And in general, study of that sort should be the goal of stylistic analysis.
All I have done here is outline, briefly and in part informally, a fruitful
method of stylistic *description*. But no *analysis* of a style, in the fuller sense,
can get off the ground until there are adequate methods for the humble task
of description. Such methods, I think, are provided by transformational
grammar. Furthermore, I have argued, such a grammar is especially useful
for this purpose in that it alone is powerful enough to set forth, formally
and accurately, stylistic *alternatives* to a given passage or a given set of
linguistic habits.

Now there is no reason to generalize from four passages to infinity, and
in fact full stylistic descriptions of the work of even the four writers I have
discussed would need to be far more elaborate than the sketches I have
offered here. Moreover, many styles that readers perceive as distinctive are
more complex in their syntactic patterns than these four. Finally, though
syntax seems to be a central determinant of style, it is admittedly not the
whole of style. Imagery, figures of speech, and the rest are often quite im-
portant. But to perform on various styles the kind of analysis I have
attempted in this paper is to be convinced that transformational patterns
constitute a significant part of what the sensitive reader perceives as style.
Transformational analysis of literary discourse promises to the critic
stylistic descriptions which are at once simpler and deeper than any
hitherto available, and therefore more adequate foundations for critical

interpretation. Not only that: if, as seems likely to happen, generative grammars with transformational rules help the linguist or critic to explicate convincingly the elusive but persistent notion of style, that achievement will stand as one more piece of evidence in favor of such grammars.

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